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The Effect of Placement of Foster Children on the Marital Relationship of Foster Parents

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THE EFFECT OF PLACEMENT OF
FOSTER CHILDREN ON THE MARITAL
RELATIONSHIP OF FOSTER PARENTS

Presented to the
Department of Counseling
and the
Faculty of the Graduate College
University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Counseling
University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Patricia L. Wilcox-Blau

December, 1990

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Accepted for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of
Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted to ascertain if the placement of foster children has an impact on the level of marital satisfaction of foster parents. Although inconclusive, research indicates that adding a child, or children, to a biological family unit causes a significant decrease in levels of marital satisfaction. There is a paucity of published empirical research as to whether this pattern would hold true with the foster parent relationship, after the placement of foster children in their home.

Data was collected using the survey approach, in which foster parents were asked to respond to the same instrument twice, with a time interval between. The first response, the participants were to describe the marital relationship after the placement of foster children. The second response was to obtain a description of the level of marital satisfaction prior to the placement of foster children.

Although the results of this base-line study were not statistically significant, there was a trend in responses that indicated the respondents perceived their marital relationship to be slightly more satisfactory before the placement of foster children, than after placement.

Further research, utilizing a true experimental design, needs to be conducted to ascertain if the same pattern of impact holds true in the foster family relationship as in the biological family relationship. Several recommendations for the continuing need for research in this area of study are brought forward, as a result of this study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is difficult for this author to know where to begin in acknowledging those people who have made a contribution to this project. So, in typical form, I will begin where I will, and trust that I will accomplish this task as well.

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The essence which began this project was generated during my internship placement with this organization. It is impossible to put into words what I have learned from them: about counseling; about people; about myself; and of GOD. Without their support, this thesis would not have materialized.

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My ever present love and appreciation goes to my mother. Her unending love and belief in who I am, has helped me to believe in myself.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Foster care is a serious concern in the United States. According to a study done by Michael Petit Associates and the National Child Welfare Leadership Center (1988), there is an increase in the number of children in the foster care system. While an increase in foster children has occurred, an equal increase in numbers of potential foster homes has not been experienced. The study indicates finding placement can be difficult. Workers in various child welfare services are continually trying to recruit qualified foster parents to close this gap.

In the State of Nebraska, not only is it difficult to find foster homes in which to place children, there are also issues around retaining those foster placements within the foster care system. Since the reduced availability of foster homes is such a widespread phenomenon, it makes retention of those foster parents and foster homes a primary issue. It would be beneficial to determine what factors cause foster parents to leave the system. One factor that would be appropriate for study would be the nature of the marital relationship of the foster

parents after the placement of foster children.

There has been a great deal written about the impact that children have on parental relationships (Belsky, 1981; Goth, 1978; Russell, 1974). Although inconclusive, research is repeatedly consistent in demonstrating that the presence of children alters the nature of the parental relationship, reducing marital quality by making personal and marital changes (Glen & McLanahan, 1982; Harriman, 1983). According to Belsky, Spanier, and Rovine (1983), the transition to parenthood, or adding another child to the family unit, results in significant unfavorable changes in the marital relationship.

In spite of this phenomena, couples continue to have children. Rewards of parenting, such as the joy of watching children develop and learn, and increased family unity, seem to offset the negative implications of parenthood.

Most of the literature available regarding the impact of children on parental relationships, deals specifically with children and their biological parents. There is a paucity of information regarding the impact that foster children may have on the marital relationship of their foster parents, and whether a similar pattern of marital change exists.

The purpose of this study is to determine the

impact of placement of foster children on the level of marital satisfaction of their foster parents.

Statement of the Problem

Is there a significant difference in marital satisfaction of foster parents, after the placement of foster children.

Significance of the Problem

While there are times that a group home is the most appropriate placement for a foster child, more often placement occurs in a foster home environment. With the increase in the number of foster children, there is a greater demand for foster homes in which these children may stay, in short term, long term, and permanent placement. Since there is a smaller percentage of foster parents, the lack of available homes can place an added demand on the caseworkers to use the homes that are currently available in the system. At times, four or more foster children may be placed in a single home. This can be very stressful to the foster parents.

While all children are demanding of parental resources, foster children require additional attention

and care to adjust to their new family environment. They must learn new family roles and expectations. In addition, they must deal with the personal issues they bring with them, and they must learn to adjust to new family loyalties. These additional demands from foster children may strain the marital relationship of the foster parents at a time when love, support, and a united front are a necessity. Foster parents must also learn to adapt. Negotiation must occur to make changes regarding: cooperation in parenting and discipline; household tasks; personal time; time available to support the marital relationship; and feelings of being tied down to the house.

If foster parents become aware of a change in the quality of their marital relationship, this change may be attributed to the presence of the foster child, even though the child is not the cause. If the change is perceived to be negative in nature, this may have an adverse effect on the couple's decision to maintain the child, or children, in their home. It may prove to be the catalyst needed for the foster parents to withdraw from the foster care system entirely. It may even have an end result in the couple obtaining a divorce.

Not only would a perceived change in marital satisfaction be a stressful event in the lives of

the foster parents, it would also expose the foster children to more distress. If the foster parents would choose termination of the placement, the child would experience additional personal stress by having to move and adjust to yet another family. According to Michael Petit Associates and the National Child Welfare Leadership Center (1988), the mean number of placements for children existing in the Nebraska foster care system is $\bar{X} = 4.3$, with a range of 1-11+ placements. It was stated that 7.2% of Nebraska's foster children had 11 or more placements. If bonding had occurred, the child may experience the move as rejection by another set of parents, which may lower self-esteem further, and contribute to even more difficulty with future placements.

However, if procedures could be identified which could serve as predictors to successful foster placement, steps could be taken to assist foster parents to maintain/improve their level of marital satisfaction.

Assumptions and Limitations

There are five assumptions related to this study.

Assumption 1. The couples will respond honestly

to the Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS).

Assumption 2. Couples in the study are within a heterosexual marriage.

Assumption 3. Couples are participating in the care of foster children for altruistic purposes, not for financial gain.

Assumption 4. Foster children are not present to hold a problematic marital relationship together.

Assumption 5. The foster children placed in the homes of the participants of this study are representative of all children within the foster care system.

There are three limitations related to this study.

Limitation 1. All the couples in this study are residents of the state of Nebraska.

Limitation 2. All participating couples are married.

Limitation 3. This is not a longitudinal study.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Related Research

There is a lack of published research information on the possible effects a foster child may have on the marital relationship of foster parents. Most of the literature that is available deals more specifically with the effect that children have on the relationship of their biological parents. A review of the literature will be presented here.

According to Campbell (1981) and Miller and Sollie (1980), the presence of a child, or children, in the family, on the average reduces the marital happiness or satisfaction of the parents. The presence of children tends to interfere with marital companionship, by interrupting time available to the couple and reducing the spontaneity in the sexual relations of the parents. The presence of children in the family creates the potential for competition, and jealousy, between the parents and the children, for time, attention, and affection (Glen & McLanahan, 1982; Rosenblatt, 1974; Ryder, 1973; Schvanevelt, 1971).

In a longitudinal study (Miller & Sollie, 1980), data indicates a decline in marital quality over the transition to parenthood. The study revealed the nature

of change along two life dimensions, of both personal and marital life. It was found that fathers and mothers experienced significant increases in personal stress, and that mothers experienced significant increases in marital stress, after the addition of a child to the family.

Harriman (1983), conducted a study on the parent's perceptions of the nature of marital and personal life changes accompanying parenthood. Results indicated that wives perceived more overall change than did husbands. Wives also reported more change in their personal lives. Husbands reported slightly more change in their marital lives than the wives did. Both husbands and wives perceived change in the sexual responsiveness of their mate. Both perceived the change in the wife's sexual responsiveness to be negative. Having less time for self was reported to be the major area of personal change for both husbands and wives. This was perceived to be the most negative personal quality of life change accompanying parenthood.

Harriman (1983) also stated that those individuals who learn what areas of personal and marital life have the greatest potential for change, can be better prepared to cope with those changes. In understanding the differences in the way that men and women experience

these personal and marital changes, they can better empathize with their partners. In understanding role change experiences, they may be able to negotiate new roles and behaviors. Realistic parent education should cover life changes that accompany parenthood, physical and emotional changes, and time management. Improving communication, re-evaluating expectations and sharing responsibilities can benefit the couple by making the transition occur more smoothly.

According to Belsky, Spanier, and Rovine (1983), the family is an integrated system that contains certain roles and status for each family member. There is a consensus that adding a new child to the family necessitates change. They indicate that the transition to parenthood, or the addition of another child to the family, results in modest but significant changes in the marital relationship, which most would call unfavorable. This includes a decline in romance, positive affection, and joint leisure time activities. The quality of the relationship was lower for couples rearing more than one child, and the quality continues to decline as additional children are added to the family. As responsibilities increase, the time available to keep parental relationships satisfactory will decrease.

According to Glen and McLanahan (1982), the

negative effects of children on marital happiness are quite pervasive, very likely outweighing the positive effects among spouses in the United States. This was true of both sexes, regardless of race, age, major religious preferences, and educational and employment status. Their reasoning for the negative relationship between the presence of a child, or children, and marital happiness is that the presence of the child may deter many unhappily married persons from divorcing, at least for some time. The relationships are maintained for the "sake of the children."

With specific regard to foster parents and the effects that foster children may have, Kline (1960) stated that it was not enough for foster parents to give good parental care. In order to provide a corrective emotional experience for the child, they must be able to withstand the emotional impact of the special problems that the child may bring and the need that s/he may have to get the foster parents to behave as their biological parents did, by recreating their early environment and patterns of relationships. He also suggests that some specific problems in foster children have the capability of uncovering a wide range of problems, not only in revealing individual issues, but in each interpersonal

relationship. He stresses it is important to check the emotional make-up of the foster parents, and their areas of emotional vulnerability.

Although the study was about older adoptive children, the following information seems applicable to the foster care experience as well. According to Katz (1986), we need to acknowledge the profound, wrenching, and often long-lasting changes that take place in the family when a disturbed child enters. The marital coalition is often deeply altered by the parents' individual, and usually different, perception and response to the child's pathology. The emotional meaning that parenthood has had for each parent can be radically undermined by the impact of a particular child's pathology.

Also according to Katz (1986), in caring for older children, we need to acknowledge the incongruence of the challenge to assume a healthy parental role over a disturbed, half-grown child for whom the parents have no sense of real entitlement. There are many contrasts between beginning with an older child, as opposed to your own biological newborn. Parents will not find any sameness or family characteristics in which to take pleasure. Instead of appealing helplessness, they are faced with a child that projects pseudomaturity. Many older children

sabotage closeness and reject it. Fantasies of making up for previous abuse and neglect are replaced by despair over the child's emotional deficits, and fears that s/he will never improve. At this point it becomes a struggle to find inspiration as a parent. Conflicts can arise over the methods of praise and discipline. Parents can become bitter as they find themselves having to cope with problems and issues that have their beginnings in the child's family of origin and past, of which they are not responsible.

As noted earlier, there is a paucity of published research regarding the impact of placement of foster children on the marital relationship of the foster parents. This review has served to identify how children impact on the marital relationship of biological parents. Also, some information about the impact of older, possible "Disturbed," adopted children on marital relationships is presented. While it may be logical to assume that foster children share a similar impact on marital relationships, no report of empirical data supporting this assumption was found.

Thus, it is the intent of this study to provide base-line data addressing these issues.

CHAPTER THREE

Design of the Study

This study was to examine if the placement of foster children had an effect on the level of marital satisfaction of foster parents. The study utilized a survey approach and the technique of having participants respond to the same instrument twice, with a time interval between. The first time, the participants were asked for a description of the marital relationship after the foster children were placed in their homes. The second time required participants to describe the marital relationship in retrospect, prior to the placement of foster children.

Population

The population in the study were foster parents licensed with the State of Nebraska Department of Social Services, and providing care within the Northeast District. From that population, a sample of 100 names (50 couples) was obtained from the Department of Social Services. All 50 couples were used as study participants. All of the participants in the study were married.

Instrumentation

The instrument used to assess the level of marital satisfaction of the participating couples was the Index of Marital Satisfaction (Hudson, 1990) (Appendix A). The Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS) is designed to measure the degree, severity, or magnitude of a problem a spouse or partner has in a marital relationship. The IMS is a 25 item instrument that is read with sixth grade level of comprehension. It is easy to score and interpret, with a score range of 0 to 100, and a clinical cutting score of 30. Scores below the clinical cutting score of 30 indicates the relative absence of problems within the marital relationship. A score above 30 indicates the presence of more severe problems. The IMS has a reliability factor of .90 or better, and is said to have good content, factorial, discriminant, construct and concurrent validity, however, no validity coefficients were reported.

In addition to the IMS, a general information survey (Appendix B) was used to gather additional information about the foster home environment, and to obtain foster parent feedback about the foster care system.

Procedure

Survey packets were delivered to potential participant couples by the U.S. Postal Service. Participants' names were used only in the mailing process. Code numbers were assigned to ensure confidentiality.

The first mailing was to obtain the participants' current description of their marital relationship, after foster children had been placed in their homes. It included a cover letter (Appendix C), which explained the request for participation. Participation was on a voluntary basis. The cover letter also included instructions on how to complete the enclosed forms. Accompanying the cover letter were two packets. Each packet contained a copy of the General Information Survey (GIS), the IMS, and a postage paid return envelope. Each participant was asked to complete one of the packets, independently of their spouse. Couples were given one week to return the completed forms. Information regarding how to obtain the results of the study was provided on the GIS.

The second mailing was made a week after the first. It was to obtain a description of the marital relationship as the participants remembered it, prior to the placement of foster children. A cover letter (Appendix D) was included, giving instructions on how

to complete the forms, and thanking the couples for their participation. Included with the cover letter were two copies of the IMS, and two postage paid return envelopes. The second mailing was also intended to remind the foster parents to return the previous packet of forms.

Analysis

Scoring procedures specifically identified for the IMS were utilized (Appendix E). Items numbered 1,3,5,8,9,11,13,16,17,19,20,21 and 23 were reverse-scored. Two scores were identified, that which represented the perception of marital satisfaction before the placement of foster children (noted as BP), and the data which represents the perception of marital satisfaction after the placement of foster children (noted as AP).

Means for each group were computed and tested for significance by using a t-test of means. The level of significance was established at .05.

Data obtained from the GIS was tabulated to demonstrate the specific makeup of the participants responding to the study. The mean age, religious preference, years married, level of education, and other relevant information were identified.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Data was obtained from 45 participants in the first mailing, a response rate of 45 percent. Data was obtained from 28 participants in the second mailing, a response rate of 28 percent. As only 28 participants (14 couples) responded to both the before placement and after placement IMS surveys, only these scores were used to acquire the mean and standard deviation for each group. Scoring was done using the required steps indicated by the author of the IMS. Means and standard deviations were computed for each group. A t-test of means was then applied to determine if the two groups differed significantly from each other. The findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Difference in Perception of Marital Satisfaction by
Couples Before and After Foster Child Placement

Measure	Before Placement		After Placement	
	N = 28		N = 28	
	M	SD	M	SD
IMS	16.22	10.20	20.32	13.0
	Range	43.3 - 2	Range	54 - 2

t value 1.6

P < .05

As shown, perceptions of the marital relationship did not differ significantly; therefore, the placement of foster children did not significantly affect the level of marital satisfaction as identified by this research.

The data obtained from the General Information Survey was tabulated and is presented in Table 2 and Table 3. The data is inclusive of all respondents to the General Information Survey (N = 45).

Table 2.

Mean, Standard Deviation and Range of Demographic
Data for Participants who responded to the General
INformation Survey (N = 45)

Criteria

Age

M = 46.4 SD = 9.84 Range = 72 - 32

Annual Income

M = 20,062.50 SD = 10, 452.87 Range = 33,000 - 2,000

Years Married

M = 17.59 SD = 8.68 Range = 36 - 6

Years as Foster Parents

M = 5.64 SD = 3.41 Range = 18 - 1

Current Placements

M = 2.2 SD = 1.78 Range = 6 - 1

Total Placements (1)

M = 14.0 SD = 22.5 Range = 87 - 1

Positive/Negative Effect of Bio. Child (2)

M = 1.94 SD = .89 Range = 4 - 1

Postive/Negative Effect of Fost. Child (3)

M = 4.52 SD = 1.93 Range = 8 - 1

(table continues)

Notes:

- 1) This is the total number of foster children who have been placed in the home.
- 2) This is the positive or negative effect that foster parents perceive their own biological children to have on the marital relationship. Scores were obtained on a scale of 1 - 10, with 1 being positive, and 10 being negative.
- 3) This is the positive or negative effect that foster parents perceive their foster children to have on their marital relationship. Scores were obtained on a scale of 1 - 10, with 1 being positive and 10 being negative.

The data indicates that foster parents perceive the impact of their own children to be more positive on their marital relationship than the perceived impact of foster children.

Table 3.

Percentages obtained from Demographic Data from
Participants who responded to the General Information
Survey (N = 45)

Criteria

Sex of Respondent

Female: 62.5% Male: 37.5%

Race

Caucasian: 100%

Religion

Lutheran: 34.6% Catholic: 23.2% Methodist: 19.3%

Christian: 7.7% Church of Christ: 3.8%

Baha'i: 3.8% Protestant: 3.8% None: 3.8%

Education(1)

H.S. Diploma: 29.2% Associates Degree: 8.3%

Some College: 16.7% Bachelors: 8.3% Masters: 16.7%

Bachelors plus Classes: 8.0% Masters plus Classes: 12.5%

Previously Married

Yes: 37% No: 63%

Own Children at Home

Yes: 51.9% No: 48.1%

First Interested in Becoming Foster Parent

Woman: 65.2% Man: 26.1% Both: 8.7%

(table continues)

Criteria

Type of Foster Care (2)

GEN FOS: 79.4% FOS ADOPT: 11.8% PRE-ADOPT: 8.8%

Foster Children with Physical Disabilities

6.5%

Foster Children with Learning Disabilities

12.9%

Foster Children with Behavior Problems

25.8%

Foster Children with Multiple Problems (3)

12.9%

Foster Children with No Listed Problems

41.9%

Foster Children Listed as receiving Special Education

40.7%

Foster Parents who have training in Child Development

Yes: 75% No: 25%

Foster Parents trained in Special Education

Yes: 30.8% No: 69.2%

Foster Parents who have received Marital Therapy

Yes: 0% No: 100%

Foster Parents who would recommend the Foster Program (4)

Yes: 63% No: 7.4% Unsure: 29.6%

(table continues)

Notes:

- 1) Of those who indicated they had a Masters degree, or a Masters degree with additional classes, 27% independently indicated they were related to a field of a helping profession (e.g. M.S.W., Clergy).
- 2) GEN FOS, General Foster Care; FOS ADOPT, Foster Adoptive Care, where adoption is the goal but legal risk is involved (e.g. biological parents may refuse to terminate parental rights); PRE-ADOPT, Pre-Adoptive Care, where adoption is the goal of placement.
- 3) Multiple Problems, where the foster parents indicate a child has a combination of physical and/or learning disabilities, and/or behavioral problems.
- 4) Of those who indicated they would recommend the foster care program, 30% independently indicated it was strictly on the basis of involvement with the foster children, and not the Department of Social Services.

The responses to questions included on the General Information Survey in which foster parents were asked for personal feedback are listed below. The responses are listed with the greatest number of responses first and the remainder in descending order. The number in parentheses indicates the

total number of individuals providing that response.

Question 7: What were your reasons for becoming involved in foster care?

- 1) To help kids in need (18)
- 2) To have children in our home (4)
- 3) Helping in difficult situations (3)
- 4) A playmate/sibling for our child/children (3).
- 5) Being involved with kids (2)
- 6) Contribute back to society (2)
- 7) Asked by a personal acquaintance (1)
- 8) Financial gain (1)

Feedback indicates that most foster parents are involved in the foster care program primarily for altruistic reasons.

Question 14: Please list the Positive and Negative effects that having your own children has had on your marital relationship.

Positive:

- 1) Gained life experience (8)
- 2) Clarified values and goals (5)
- 3) Better problem solving (4)
- 4) Family activities (3)
- 5) Better communication (3)
- 6) More loving/giving attitude for each other (3)
- 7) Source of pride (2)
- 8) Continuation of family (2)

9) Kept us young at heart (2)

Negative:

1) Conflicts regarding discipline (5)

2) Less time together (4)

3) Seeing your limitations as a parent (3)

4) Too easy to use kids as a focus for disagreement,
whether they are the problem or not (3)

Question 16: Please list the Positive and Negative effects that having foster children has had on your marital relationship.

Positive:

1) Better communication between the couple (8)

2) Working together (7)

3) More family time (4)

4) Helped solidify values (3)

5) Fun (3)

6) Kept us young at heart (2)

7) Larger family (1)

8) Having children (1)

Negative:

1) Less time together (6)

2) Negative impact on your kids (5)

3) Disagreements on discipline (3)

4) Pressure from the Department of Social Services (3)

5) Less personal time (3)

6) Loss of privacy (2)

Question 19: If you would leave the foster care system, what would be your reasons?

- 1) Getting too old (8)
- 2) Getting too attached to the kids and then the Department of Social Services pulls them from the home (8)
- 3) Too busy (7)
- 4) Taking care of own family's needs (5)
- 5) Not wanting to put up with caseworkers (5)
- 6) Burn out (5)
- 7) Inappropriate support from the Department of Social Services (5)
- 8) Poor attitude on behalf of the State about foster parents (4)
- 9) Department of Social Services unwilling to resolve conflicts (4)
- 10) State of Nebraska's poor attitude towards foster kids (3)
- 11) Bad effect on our kids (3)
- 12) Lack of respite (3)
- 13) Inappropriately trained caseworkers (3)
- 14) Damage of property by kids (1)

Question 21: What changes would you make in the foster care system to make it better?

- 1) Improve follow up/contact with caseworkers (15)
- 2) Better treatment of foster parents (12)

- 3) Better trained caseworkers (12)
- 4) Get foster parents' input on decisions made on kids (11)
- 5) More money to take care of kids/Prompt payment (11)
- 6) Reduce social worker's caseload/Get more caseworkers (10)
- 7) Give background information on kids (9)
- 8) Caseworkers respond to crisis, not ignoring it (9)
- 9) Better quality counselors (5)
- 10) More education offered to foster parents (5)
- 11) Improve support of foster parents (3)
- 12) Counseling and legal aid (3)
- 13) Better treatment of kids (2)
- 14) Biological families meet the same criteria as foster parents (2)
- 15) Don't overload the foster parents (2)
- 16) Allowing inter-racial adoption (1)
- 17) Stick to developed rules (1)
- 18) Less or better supervised visits with biological parents (1)
- 19) Less Paperwork (1)
- 20) More foster homes (1)
- 21) Do not label the kids (1)

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Although there was not a statistically significant difference found between the Before Placement and After Placement responses in this study, there was a trend in responses that indicated that foster parents perceived their marital relationships to be slightly more satisfactory before the placement of foster children in their homes, than after the placement of foster children (See Table 1). Further research, utilizing a true experimental research design, needs to be conducted to ascertain if the impact of foster children on the marital relationships of foster parents follows a similar pattern as the effect that children have on the marital relationship of their biological parents.

Of the respondents that indicated they had children of their own, it was found that the foster parents perceived the impact of their own children to be more positive on their marital relationships, than the perceived impact of the foster children. Additional research in this area would be of benefit, to understand the reasoning behind this perception.

It would be interesting to do a study of foster parents who have been previously married. Further

research could ascertain if the loss of the marriage was because of the death of a spouse, a problematic relationship, or, if the couple was involved in the foster care program, due to the impact of foster children on the level of marital satisfaction.

It was indicated that over 58 percent of the foster children placed in homes were seen as having: physical disabilities; learning disabilities; behavioral problems; or multiple category problems. It would be interesting to see if different types of foster children have more impact than others, on the level of marital satisfaction of the foster parents. This would be most difficult to achieve, as it seems that most foster homes have more than one type of placement. Obtaining clear results would be possible only if there were foster homes that were caring for children in each specific category.

It was interesting to note that while 58.1 percent of the foster children were perceived by the foster parents to have some type of disability, only 40.7 percent were listed as receiving special education within the school system. Once a child is diagnosed as having a disability, special education classes must be provided, by law. This discrepancy between the perception of a diagnosis by the foster parents and diagnosis by the State, should indicate

the need for further research to ascertain if labeling by the foster parents, or mis-diagnosis, is occurring.

Of those foster children who are listed as having disabilities or behavioral problems, 19.1 percent live in homes that provide Foster Adoptive care, and 19.1 percent live in homes that provide Pre-Adoptive care. These same homes also listed themselves as providing General Foster care as well. It is unknown if these children are placed for receiving general care, or adoptive care. Further study would be required to ascertain if this information would be supportive of theories that disabled or behaviorally impaired children have a more difficult time in being adopted.

It is interesting to note that all of the respondents in this study were caucasian. It is believed that this phenomena is due to the rural nature of the Northeast District. Included in the district, however, is a large population of Native Americans. It is not known if the absence of this population is due to tribal laws or customs, or other considerations, such as the Department of Social Services or the Bureau of Indian Affairs. It should also be noted that there were Native American children listed as being foster children, by the respondents to this study.

Over 60 percent of the total respondents to the General Information Survey were women. Also, over 65 percent of the respondents indicated that it was the woman who was first interested in becoming a foster parent. It would be interesting to ascertain what factors were involved in this primarily female response rate.

It would be important to discover what the motivating factors were that caused the men to become interested in foster care. It is unclear from this study if motivation was from lack of biological children in which to take pride, or if financial gain was a factor. If reasons could be identified on what motivates men to become foster parents, steps could be taken to approach potential foster parent recruits in a way that would generate new interest, and therefore, more foster homes.

Over 60 percent of the total respondents indicated they would recommend being foster parents. Of those who would give their recommendation, 30 percent stated on a voluntary basis that the recommendation would be for the children only. They indicated that working with the Department of Social Services was difficult, but necessary, if you wished to be involved. Almost a third of the total respondents indicated they were unsure if they would recommend

being foster parents. It would be helpful to determine what factors prompted that response in order that steps may be taken to improve the experience, thus, encouraging involvement in foster care.

This researcher was surprised at the consistency in the responses given by the foster parents in regard to what would cause them to leave the foster care program, and what changes would improve the system. There seemed to be a pervasive negative response to the Department of Social Services, and the way cases were handled. Comments of little contact with caseworkers, not enough information about the children and the need for more support were repeated over and over again. It seemed that frustration was focused on the system, and not so much with the foster children themselves. Certainly, if additional studies are done on the impact that foster children have on the marital relationship of foster parents, it would be important to separate out the actual impact of the foster children from the impact of the system that invariably accompanies them.

It needs to be pointed out that there may be a non-response bias in operation here. Simply put, of the 100 packets that were mailed, a 45 percent response rate was received in return. Perhaps those

participants that did respond felt quite strongly about their experiences and frustrations, and decided that this study could be used as a "forum" by which they could voice their frustrations. A follow-up study of those not responding to the surveys would be appropriate to determine if this pattern would hold true.

Of those foster parents who stated they experienced frustration, perhaps they would benefit from additional education about dealing with the changes involved in being a foster parent. Learning how to cope with the changes in marital relationships, and how to deal most effectively with the foster children and the system that accompanies them may be beneficial in maintaining foster parents within the system.

Ultimately, it is very important to evaluate that which causes qualified foster parents to leave the system. The primary concern is to be able to provide quality, consistent, stable, loving care to children who are in need; e.g., children who have experienced abuse, neglect, and betrayal at the hands of someone they trusted. To subject them to additional loss and confusion, due to foster parents having the children removed from their homes and leaving the foster care program, is to

again victimize these children. It is important to support foster parents in the task they have undertaken. Providing them with education, and respect, for what they do is essential. For it is their impact on the foster child that determines whether or not the foster child will be able to adapt and adjust to their new surroundings, and lead a happy, productive life.

Recommendations

Since there is little published material regarding the effect that foster children have on the marital relationship of foster parents, additional research is needed. Listed below are several recommendations for further research, as identified by this baseline study.

- 1) A longitudinal study conducted to ascertain levels of marital satisfaction before and after placement of foster children.
- 2) A study to ascertain how foster parents perceive the impact of their biological children on their marital relationship versus how they perceive the impact of their foster children on their marital relationship.
- 3) A study to examine the impact that various types of foster children have on the marital

relationships of foster parents (e.g. physically disabled, learning disabled, older children, sexually abused children, etc.).

- 4) Further research to ascertain if labeling or mis-diagnosis of foster children occurs within the foster care system.
- 5) A study to evaluate circumstances around previous marriages of foster parents.
- 6) A study to evaluate factors that motivated foster fathers who were first interested in becoming foster parents.
- 7) A study to ascertain if disabled children are more often placed in general foster care programs.
- 8) A follow-up study regarding the non-response bias, and views of the Department of Social Services.

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APPENDIX A

Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS)

This questionnaire is designed to measure the degree of satisfaction you have with your present marriage. It is not a test, so there are no right or wrong answers. Answer each item as carefully and as accurately as you can by placing a number beside each one as follows:

1=None of the time

2=Very rarely

3=A little of the time

4=Some of the time

5=A good part of the time

6=Most of the time

7=All of the time

- ___ 1. My partner is affectionate enough.
- ___ 2. My partner treats me badly.
- ___ 3. My partner really cares for me.
- ___ 4. I feel that I would not choose the same partner if I had it to do over again.
- ___ 5. I feel that I can trust my partner.
- ___ 6. I feel that our relationship is breaking up.
- ___ 7. My partner really doesn't understand me.
- ___ 8. I feel that our relationship is a good one.

APPENDIX A cont.

- ___9. Ours is a very happy relationship.
- ___10. Our life together is dull.
- ___11. We have a lot of fun together.
- ___12. My partner does not confide in me.
- ___13. Ours is a very close relationship.
- ___14. I feel that I cannot rely on my partner.
- ___15. I feel that we do not have enough interests
in common.
- ___16. We manage arguments and disagreements very
well.
- ___17. We do a good job of managing our finances.
- ___18. I feel that I should never have married
my partner.
- ___19. My partner and I get along very well together.
- ___20. Our relationship is very stable.
- ___21. My partner is a real comfort to me.
- ___22. I feel that I no longer care for my partner.
- ___23. I feel that the future looks bright for
our relationship.
- ___24. I feel that our relationship is empty.
- ___25. I feel that there is no excitement in our
relationship.

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1,3,5,8,9,11,13,16,17,19,20,21,23

APPENDIX B

General Information Survey

This survey is to collect general information about your home environment, and the children who reside with you. Please answer the survey separately from your spouse. All information will be kept confidential.

Age:_____ Sex:___M ___F Race:_____

Religion:_____ Employed:___Yes ___No

Annual Income:_____ What is your level

of education:_____

1) How long have you and your spouse been married?_____

2) Have you been married before?___Yes___No

(If yes, how many previous marriages?_____)

3) Other than foster children, are there children living at your home?___Yes___No

Please list the age/sex/type of each child

(i.e. birth children, step-children, legally

adopted children, etc.)_____

4) How long have you and your spouse been foster parents?_____

5) How long had you been married before becoming foster parents?_____

APPENDIX B cont.

- 6) Who was first interested in foster parenting?
 _____Myself_____My Spouse
- 7) What were your reasons for becoming involved
 in foster care?_____
- 8) What type of foster care do you provide:
 ___General Foster Care (short/long term care)
 ___FOS-ADOPTIVE Care (legal risk children)
 ___PRE-ADOPTIVE Care (Adoption goal of placement)
- 9) How many foster children do you currently have
 living in your home?_____
- 10) How many total foster children have lived with
 you?_____
- 11) Please answer the following questions about
 each foster child living with you currently.
- a) Age:___Sex:___M___F Race:_____
- Classified as Physically disabled?___Y___N
- Classified as Learning disabled?___Y___N
- Severe behavior problems?___Y___N
- Do they receive special education in school?
 Yes___No___ If yes, what type?___Orthopedic?
 ___Emotional disturbance?___Hearing impaired?
 Other:_____
- Reason removed from biological home? _____

APPENDIX B cont.

- 12) Have you had training in Child Development?
 ___Yes___No
- 13) Have you had training in Special Education?
 ___Yes___No
- 14) Please list the POSITIVE effects that having
 your own children has had on your marital relation-
 ship (biological, step-children, legally adopted)

 NEGATIVE effects _____
- 15) Please indicate on the scale below how you perceive
 their overall effect
- | Positive | | | | | (please choose one) | | | | | Negative | | | | | | | | | |
|----------|---|---|---|---|---------------------|---|---|---|----|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
- 16) Please list the POSITIVE effects that having
 foster children has had on your marital relation-
 ship: _____
 NEGATIVE: _____
- 17) Please indicate on the scale below how you perceive
 their overall effect
- | Positive | | | | | (please choose one) | | | | | Negative | | | | | | | | | |
|----------|---|---|---|---|---------------------|---|---|---|----|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
- 18) Have you and your spouse received marital therapy?
 Yes___No___
- 19) If you would leave the foster care system, what
 would be your reasons? _____

APPENDIX B cont.

20) Have you, or would you recommend that people
become involved in the foster care program?

___Yes___No___Unsure

21) What changes would you make in the foster care
system to make it better?_____

Check here if you would like the results of the
study_____

APPENDIX C

First Letter to the Foster Parents

Dear Foster Parents:

I am a graduate student at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. I am currently working on my Thesis, which is required to complete my Masters degree in counseling.

As a counselor, I am interested in marital relationships, and what factors add to a satisfactory marriage. My Thesis is about levels of marital satisfaction, as it applies to foster parenting. I am contacting foster parents within the State of Nebraska to ask for participants in my study.

Any information given in the study will be kept strictly confidential. Names will be used only for mailing purposes, and will not be directly linked to your responses. All participants will be assigned a code number to assure this confidentiality.

Please complete the enclosed forms according to their directions. I have included two copies, one for each of you to complete. Please complete the forms separately from your partner. Completion of the survey will take approximately 10 minutes. When you have finished the forms, please return them to me in the enclosed envelopes, within a one week period of time. Next week, I will mail one

APPENDIX C cont.

last form, which will require approximately 5 minutes to complete. When you have finished, you will mail it as well.

I would like to thank you for your participation and assistance with this research project. Again, let me assure you that all information will be kept strictly confidential, and no names will be associated with your information.

If you would like additional information about my Thesis, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Patricia L. Blau
8031 West Center Rd.
Omaha, NE. 68124

• APPENDIX D

Second Letter to Foster Parents/Instructions

Dear Foster Parents:

Enclosed, please find the final portion of my survey. Please complete the form separately from your spouse, and return it to me as soon as possible in the enclosed envelopes.

I truly appreciate your assistance with my project. It is my hope that the results of my study can be used to help initiate changes within the system, to make foster care a better experience for all of those involved.

Sincerely,

Patricia L. Blau
8031 W. Center
Omaha, NE. 68124

Please complete this survey by answering the questions about your marriage, as you remember it, prior to becoming foster parents.

APPENDIX E

Scoring Instructions

The following procedures provide complete instructions for scoring the instrument contained in this pad of assessment scales. The final score will always range from 0 to 100. Two major definitions must be used in scoring the scale. They are:

N=The number of items that were properly completed by the respondent. Any item that was omitted or scored outside the range of permitted responses for the scale should be given a score of 0 and such items are not counted in N.

K=The largest item response permitted for this instrument. For example, if the instrument indicates that items should be scored from 1 to 7, then $K = 7$.

Step 1: REVERSE SCORING ITEMS. If one or more numbers are listed below the copyright notation of the scale it is necessary as the first step to reverse-score the items that correspond to those numbers. In order to reverse-score any item, compute $X = K - Y + 1$ where X is the reverse-scored value and Y is the original score recorded by the respondent. Be sure to reverse-score all appropriate items before proceeding to the next step. Example: An item to be reverse-scored is given a score of 5 by the respondent and $K = 7$; thus, $X = 7 - 5 + 1 = 3$.

APPENDIX E cont.

Step 2: Add up all the item responses and post
that sum in the space marked SUM. SUM_____

Step 3: Enter the number of correctly
completed items. N_____

Step 4: Subtract N from SUM. SUM - N_____

Step 5: Multiply SUM - N by 100 (SUM-N)(100)_____

Step 6: Divide the value obtained in Step 5 by
(N) (K-1) and post the result as the final SCORE.

Example: Sum = 114, N = 23, K = 7 and, therefore,
Score = $(114 - 23) (100) / [(23) (7-1)] = 65.94.$

SCORE_____